

Title: **JUDAH, TAMAR,**
AND THE PURPOSE OF GOD

Text: Genesis 38:1-30

Subject: *Judah and Tamar*

Date: Sunday Evening — February 6, 2011

Tape # AA-05

Readings: *Frank Hall and Ron Wood*
Psalm 105:1-45

Introduction:

(Genesis 38) “And it came to pass at that time, that **Judah went down** from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. {2} And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuah; and he took her, and went in unto her. {3} And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er. {4} And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan. {5} And she yet again conceived, and bare a son; and called his name Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bare him. {6} And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar. {7} And Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him. {8}

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And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother. {9} And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. {10} And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also. {11} Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.

{12} And in process of time the daughter of Shuah Judah's wife died; and Judah was comforted, and went up unto his sheepshearers to Timnath, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. {13} And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold thy father in law goeth up to Timnath to shear his sheep. {14} And she put her widow's garments off from her, and covered her with a veil, and

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wrapped herself, and sat in an open place, which *is* by the way to Timnath; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife. {15} When Judah saw her, he thought her *to be* an harlot; because she had covered her face. {16} And he turned unto her by the way, and said, Go to, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee; (for he knew not that she *was* his daughter in law.) And she said, What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me? {17} And he said, I will send *thee* a kid from the flock. And she said, Wilt thou give *me* a pledge, till thou send *it*? {18} And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet, and thy bracelets, and thy staff that *is* in thine hand. And he gave *it* her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him. {19} And she arose, and went away, and laid by her veil from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood. {20} And Judah sent the kid by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive *his* pledge from the woman's hand: but he found her not. {21} Then he asked the men of that place, saying, Where *is*

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the harlot, that *was* openly by the way side? And they said, There was no harlot in this *place*. {22} And he returned to Judah, and said, I cannot find her; and also the men of the place said, *that* there was no harlot in this *place*. {23} And Judah said, Let her take *it* to her, lest we be shamed: behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her.

{24} And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she *is* with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt. {25} When she *was* brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these *are*, *am* I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose *are* these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff. {26} And Judah acknowledged *them*, and said, **She hath been more righteous than I**; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.

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{27} And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins *were* in her womb.

{28} And it came to pass, when she travailed, that *the one* put out *his* hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first. {29} And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? *this* breach *be* upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez. {30} And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zarah.”

How do you feel, after reading this story? — Revolted? — Disgusted? — Shocked? — Horrified? — Embarrassed? — Dismayed? What are your thoughts?

If you read the Scriptures carefully, paying attention to what you read, you will sometimes come across a passage which seems totally out of place. When you do, don't just glance over it, or ignore it. **That which seems out of place in the Word of God is put**

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where it is to get out attention, to teach us something extraordinary.

Without question, anyone reading through the Book of Genesis, as he reads chapters 37, 38, and 39, and on to the end of the Book, has to stop, scratch his head, and ask — “What do the events in chapter 38 have to do with the story of Joseph’s betrayal, imprisonment, and exaltation?”

The fact is, the events in Genesis 38 have very little, if anything, to do with the history of Joseph. **These thirty verses interrupt the history of Joseph.** They seem to have been thrown into the story haphazardly. At first glance, the whole passage seems out of place. But that is not the case. **These thirty verses were given by Divine inspiration. Moses wrote this narrative exactly as God the Holy Spirit directed him.** And the things here recorded “*were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope*” (Romans 15:4). May God the Holy Spirit, who inspired Moses to

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record this piece of sacred history, now inscribe upon our hearts the lessons He here teaches.

The title of my message is **JUDAH, TAMAR, AND THE PURPOSE OF GOD.** In verse 1 we are told that “**Judah went down.**” But before I am done, you will see that **Judah’s degradation, shameful as it was, was the bleak, black backdrop upon which the Lord God would display the wondrous glory of His grace.** Here we see sin abounding, and grace super-abounding! What we have before us in this chapter is much, much more than a story of sin and degradation. This is a story of grace, marvelous, free, sovereign, amazing grace.

JUDAH’S SIN

The first thing, the most obvious thing, set before us in this chapter is **the utter depravity of our race.** Since the fall of our father Adam, one thing has always characterized the human race. One thing can always be counted on as a matter of certainty. One thing can be seen in the course of every son of Adam,

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in the life of every mortal, in the history of every family. There is one black mark by which every man is identified, one odious characteristic by which our race is identified, one horrible plague by which every heart is corrupted and every life is defiled. That one thing is sin. Sin is what we are. Sin is what we do. Sin is the thing that dominates our lives by nature. — **“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”** We are all, by nature, **“children of wrath,”** a people deserving the wrath of God. We are a race of evil doers.

This is a fact which history verifies. The total depravity of man is verified in every newspaper in the world every day. Our politicians, like preachers, like to flatter people, and talk about man’s “innate goodness.” But the Word of God speaks not of man’s innate goodness, but his innate vileness. It is written, **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”**

Though Judah was a chosen sinner, one predestined to eternal life, a man in the direct lineage of

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Abraham, one to whom the Lord God had sent the light of Divine revelation when very few were given such light, Judah proved himself to be a wicked, sinful, depraved man.

We are not told how or why it came to pass, but this chapter opens by declaring that **“Judah went down from his brethren.”**

(Genesis 38:1) “And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.”

In direct violation of the revealed will of God, Judah chose to abandon the family of Abraham, the people of God, and took for his choice companion an Adullamite, by the name of Hirah. No doubt, he felt fully justified in his actions. I do not doubt for a moment that he could vindicate his choice before any man. **But I assure you, the path of compromise is the path of sorrow.** It is written, “*Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*” If you take fire to

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your bosom, you are going to get burned. If you sow to the wind, you will reap the whirlwind. Let's see if Judah's history does not verify this.

- He chose a pagan for his friend.
- Then he chose a pagan for his wife.
- His two oldest sons (Er and Onan), following the example of their father, were slain under the wrath of God.

We are not told what **Er's wickedness** was; but it was obviously something for which he was manifestly slain by the hand of God (v. 7). **Onan's sin, however is specifically described** (vv. 7-10).

(Genesis 38:7-10) “And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him. {8} And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother. {9} And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled *it* on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. {10} And the

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thing which he did displeased the LORD:
wherefore he slew him also.”

There have been many things written about Onan’s sin. Papists and others point to this as a proof text against birth control. But I am certain that God did not send this man to hell simply because he spilled his seed on the ground.

That which was later written in the law of God given to Israel (Deuteronomy 25:5), was already clearly established as the revealed will of God to the children of Abraham. If a brother died without children, his brother next to him was required to take his wife and raise up a son in the name of his dead brother.

This law was given to none but Israel. It applied to none but Israel. It was given to Israel, to Abraham’s children, because the Lord God promised to send his Son, the Messiah, our Redeemer, through Abraham’s seed. The promised Redeemer, the promised Savior, in whom all

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blessedness is found, and the heritage of grace in Him, was the birthright of the firstborn son.

When Onan refused to raise up a child in the name of his brother, he showed contempt for God's covenant, despising God's Son. Just as Esau before him, Onan snubbed his nose at God's goodness and grace in Christ. It was for this that God killed him. — **I am here to tell you that God almighty has not changed. He still sends men and women to hell for snubbing their noses at His Son.**

After the death of his first two sons, Judah promised Tamar that as soon as his third son, Shelah, was old enough, he would marry her. But, in verse 11, we are told that it was a promise he had no intention of keeping.

Judah's incest with Tamar stands as a warning to all. — What could be more terrible than the record here given of Judah and his family? Here is a man brought up in the midst of a favored people, blessed with godly influences, surrounded by examples of

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grace from his youth. Yet, Judah chose the rebel's path. The consequences of his actions are glaring. His sons were slain under the wrath of God. Still, Judah goes on, walking after the lusts of his flesh.

After the death of his wife, Judah took his Adullamite friend with him to see about the shearing of his sheep.

- Tamar disguised herself as a harlot.
- Judah hired his daughter-in-law as a prostitute.
- He sent his companion in ungodliness to pay his harlot and retrieve his signet, his bracelets, and his staff.
- When Hirah could not find a harlot in the place, Judah thought the matter was over. He shrugged his shoulders and said, “That’s that. Let her take those things and forget the matter, lest we be ashamed.”
- When Judah heard that Tamar was pregnant, he was enraged, and said, “Let her be burned.” That is to say, “Let her wear the mark of a whore (Leviticus 21:9), so that all seeing her will know

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what kind of woman she is.” – What hypocrisy!
— What self-righteousness!

At last, Judah acknowledged and confessed his sin
(vv. 24-26).

(Genesis 38:24-26) “And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she *is* with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt. {25} When she *was* brought forth, she sent to her father in law, saying, By the man, whose these *are*, *am* I with child: and she said, Discern, I pray thee, whose *are* these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff. {26} And Judah acknowledged *them*, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more.”

This seems to be the time of Judah’s conversion. I say that not only because he acknowledged his sin.

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He really had no choice in that matter. He was caught red-handed. But he did more. He stated plainly that Tamar, though guilty of incest, knowingly so, (which is certainly a worse crime than fornication with a prostitute), had acted more righteously than he.

How can that be? Tamar seems to have realized and believed the promise of God concerning the gift of His Son through Judah, the promise that up to this point Judah and his sons had despised. Being denied marriage to Shelah, she was determined to have Christ, no matter the cost.

No, there is no justification for her incest. What she did was horribly evil. Yet, Judah declares here that her actions were more righteous than his. In doing so, he acknowledges and confesses his sin. And those who do that are forgiven sinners (1 John 1:9).

(1 John 1:9) “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

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DIVINE ELECTION

Second, this 38th chapter of Genesis is a plain declaration that **Divine election is a matter of pure, free grace.** Judah was chosen as the object of God's grace simply because God loved him. There was nothing good, noble, or righteous about this man by nature. Every choice he made was evil. He was not seeking the Lord, but serving the lusts of his flesh, when God stopped him in his path to destruction.

- Judah was no better than his sons; but God chose Judah.
- Judah was no more upright than Hirah; but God chose Judah.
- This chapter is written to teach us, forcibly and plainly, that salvation is by grace alone. – Not by man's will, but by God's will. – Not by man's work, but by God's work. – Not by man's worth, but by Christ's worth.

That which distinguished Judah from his neighbors and his own family, and that which

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alone distinguishes God's elect from the rest of the world is the distinguishing grace of God.

(1 Corinthians 4:7) “For who maketh thee to differ *from another?* and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it?*”

(1 Corinthians 1:26-31) “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called:* {27} But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; {28} And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: {29} That no flesh should glory in his presence. {30} But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and

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redemption: {31} That, according as it is written,
He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

GOD’S PURPOSE

A third thing displayed in this chapter is **the absolute immutability of God’s purpose**. God had purposed from eternity that his Son would come into this world through the line of Judah. So it must be. And so it was. As surely as this chapter records the faithlessness of man, it records the immutable faithfulness of our God.

(Matthew 9:10-11) “And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. {11} And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?”

“Not only does our Master eat and drink with publicans and sinners, but the twelve gates of heaven

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are named for them to encourage the chiefest of sinners to come unto Him (Revelation 21:12).”

— Ralph Bouma

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Here again, we see the wondrous mystery of Divine providence. Once more, God overrules evil for good (Romans 8:28). Our God is always behind the scene. All the vast machinery of providence is under His control, absolutely. His finger directs all the circumstances of the universe.

He who is Lord of all is above all, rules all, and uses all for the good of His people, the glory of His name, and the accomplishment of His purpose of grace in Christ. **How sweet, how blessed, how comforting it is to the believing heart to trace all things back to the will of God our Father!** All angels, men, and devils are His servants and execute His purposes precisely!

(Romans 8:28-30) “And we know that all things

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work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. {29} For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. {30} Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

(Romans 11:33-36) “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out! {34} For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? {35} Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? {36} For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen.”

THE GLORY OF CHRIST

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Not only does this chapter give us a genealogical record of Christ ancestors, it shows us that our Savior's glory as a man was native to Himself. It was not a glory derived from His ancestors.

- The Jews proudly boasted that they were not born of fornication, though in fact that is precisely how the nation was born.
- Our Savior's glorious righteousness as a man was the glory of His own sinless nature and His own perfect obedience as our Substitute.

(John 17:4-5) "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. {5} And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

THE GRACE OF GOD

As God dealt with Judah, so he deals with all his elect in grace, free, sovereign, saving grace (Ephesians 2:1-4; Romans 5:12-21).

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(Ephesians 2:1-4) “And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins: {2} Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: {3} Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. {4} But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.”

(Romans 5:12) “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:”

(Romans 5:13-17) “(For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s

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transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. 15 But not as the offence, so also [is] the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, [which is] by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. 16 And not as [it was] by one that sinned, [so is] the gift: for the judgment [was] by one to condemnation, but the free gift [is] of many offences unto justification. 17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)”

(Romans 5:18-21) “18 Therefore as by the offence of one [judgment came] upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [the free gift came] upon all men unto justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. 20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence

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might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: 21 That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Genesis 38 stands before us as a most blessed display of God’s amazing, free grace to sinners in Christ. Instead of casting Judah and Tamar into hell for their sin, God had chosen not only to save them, but to make them the direct progenitors of Christ. God grace is not frustrated and cannot be frustrated. That which appears to be a hindrance to grace is but the instrument of grace. The Son of God, the Lord of Glory not only came down here to save sinners, He purposed from eternity to identify Himself with sinners even in his ancestry through the tribe of Judah (Ruth 4:12-13; Matthew 1:1-3; Hebrews 7:14; Revelation 5:5-12).

(Ruth 4:12-13) “And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of

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this young woman. {13} So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.”

(Matthew 1:1-3) “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. {2} Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; {3} And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram;”

(Hebrews 7:14) “For *it is* evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.”

(Revelation 5:5-12) “And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. {6} And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the

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midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. {7} And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. {8} And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four *and* twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. {9} And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; {10} And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. {11} And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; {12} Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength,

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and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

The history of Judah is written for us in these 30 verses of Inspiration to teach us that where sin abounds, grace super-abounds.

- In Election
- In Redemption
- In Providence
- In Forgiveness
- In Blessedness

Our great God, in His great grace, rises above and overrules the sin and folly of man for the salvation of His elect and the glory of His own great name. Yes, He rises above and overrules our sin and folly for our salvation, to the praise of the glory of His grace. And when He gets done, every creature in heaven, earth, and hell will see the wonder of His work and praise him for everything that has been.

Lift your eyes to heaven. Do you see Sister Tamar there around the throne, that poor wretch, that desperate, incestuous whore is there, seated with

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Christ on His throne a pure, chaste virgin. Without spot, without wrinkle, without sin she sits (with all the Church above) as Christ's own Bride, the Queen of Heaven, washed in the blood and robed in the righteousness of Christ Himself! — That's called "Grace!" — Pure, free, sovereign grace! Yes, where sin abounds, grace does much, much, much more abound!

Amen.